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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: TOWNSEND-SALEH MEETING PROVIDES OPENING FOR
ADDITIONAL CT COOPERATION

REF: A. SANAA 1859
[1](#)B. SANAA 1935
[1](#)C. SANAA 1633
[1](#)D. SANAA 1901

Classified By: DCM Angie Bryan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(U) Frances Townsend, Assistant to the President for
Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, has cleared this
cable.

Summary
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2.(S) Frances Townsend, Assistant to the President for
Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, met with President
Saleh in Aden on October 22 to discuss mutual cooperation in
the War on Terror. During the meeting, Saleh accepted
Townsend's request for USG interrogation of Jamal al-Badawi,
convicted architect of the bombing of the USS Cole. Saleh
blamed "aging agents" in the Political Security Organization
(PSO) for inadequate cooperation, asked the USG to pressure
regional Gulf countries to stop their support of southern
"secessionist" movements, accepted Townsend's offer of USG
assistance in preparation of counterterrorism and cash
courier laws, and agreed to the need for joint operations to
combat terrorism outside Yemen. Saleh also warned against
the threat of Iran, specifically with regard to its role
inside Iraq, and promised to do more to curb the flow of
young Yemeni men going to fight in Iraq. The meeting was
generally a constructive one, with the Yemeni President
making some positive commitments. Post will continue to work
with the ROYG to ensure these commitments are not forgotten.
End Summary

Jamal "He is Under my Microscope" al-Badawi and Friends
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3.(S) Frances Townsend, Assistant to the President for
Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, met with President
Ali Abdullah Saleh in Aden on October 22 to discuss mutual
cooperation in the War on Terror. During the lunch portion
of the meeting, also attended by the Foreign Minister, the
Governor of Aden, and a member of Parliament, she asked for
an update on the status of Jamal al-Badawi, convicted
architect of the bombing of the USS Cole (ref B). The
President confirmed al-Badawi's release, clarifying that he
is under house arrest, living and working on his farm near

Aden, while the ROYG closely monitors him. Saleh added that while Yemeni authorities pursued al-Badawi, the ROYG was transmitting messages to him "promising" that if he turned himself in, his "situation would get better." Saleh said he personally met with al-Badawi "two weeks ago" and had a frank discussion with him. "Al-Badawi promised to give up terrorism and I told him that his actions damaged Yemen and its image; he began to understand," Saleh said.

4.(S) Townsend expressed dismay over al-Badawi's release and asked for USG access to interrogate him. Saleh told Townsend not to worry, "he is under my microscope," but had no objections to her request, reiterating numerous times that interested USG entities could interrogate al-Badawi by coordinating with the Political Security Organization (PSO).

5.(S) Saleh specifically mentioned two other escapees that remain at large: Abdullah al-Wadi'i and Nasr al-Wahishi. He said al-Wahishi had taken the place of Abu Ali as head of al-Qaeda in Yemen. Townsend reiterated USG concern over the ROYG's house arrest system, with a reference to the cases of Ibrahim Makri and Mansur al-Bahani, both of whom were linked to terrorist activity while under house arrest.

Weapons Trafficking: You Can't Make This Stuff Up

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6.(C) As Townsend began to ask Saleh about his efforts to combat weapons trafficking, Saleh interrupted her to invite one of Yemen's top three weapons traffickers, Faris Mana'a, into the lunch meeting. When Mana'a, who met with the President earlier in the day, entered the room, Saleh jokingly addressed the Embassy Assistant Legal Attach (Legatt), saying, "hey FBI, if he does not behave properly,

you can take him... back to Washington in Townsend's plane or to Guantanamo." The Legatt replied, "we could put both Mana'a and al-Badawi on the plane;" however, the translator did not report this to Saleh, making it unlikely that the President heard the Legatt's reply. Meanwhile, Presidential staff provided Mana'a with a chair at the table. Saleh explained that the ROYG had recently confiscated a shipment of "pistols" from Mana'a and given them to the military. Townsend lightheartedly commented, "he has donated weapons to the nation's military -- he can be considered a patriot now." Saleh responded with laughter, saying, "no, he is a double agent -- he also gave weapons to the al-Houthi rebels." The President said the Ministry of Defense was the only entity in Yemen authorized to purchase weapons. (Comment: If the President's statement were an accurate portrayal of the situation, arms dealers would effectively be out of business. Saleh's comment has been made to Post numerous times before. This, and Mana'a's presence at the Palace, raises serious questions about the President's commitment to stopping weapons trafficking. Mana'a also runs a construction company and a petroleum services business, with contracts in Iraq. His ties to Saleh may extend beyond money made from the weapons trade. End Comment)

7.(C) Saleh said the new weapons ban (ref C) in Yemen's major cities had been a success, receiving a surprisingly positive public response. He specified that in the past month 45,000 pieces of weaponry had been collected. The Governor of Aden added that his city was "100% clean of weapons." Saleh expressed a desire to "follow the United States example" of licensing guns. When asked by the Legatt if he was going to expand the weapons ban outside major cities, Saleh responded that it is a "step-by-step" process.

PSO: The Old Guard is the Problem

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8.(S) Townsend complimented Yemen's National Security Bureau, saying, "it has done good work, despite its youth," yet complained of a lack of cooperation from the PSO with the USG. Saleh replied that his proposed constitutional amendments (ref A) were the first step in addressing this problem. At Foreign Minister al-Qirbi's insistence, Saleh

elaborated upon his answer, adding that, "although the PSO has firm orders to cooperate and respond quickly, its agents are aging," alluding to PSO Head, Ghalib Mutahi Qamish. (Note: Qamish has been a topic of (sometimes tense) discussion between Townsend and Saleh in the past. End Note)

The Gulf Factor: Fueling Southern Unrest

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9.(S) While Saleh claimed the situation in the rebellious northern Saada governorate was "very calm," he expressed apprehension over the unrest in the South. The President asked the USG to pressure countries funding southern opposition, saying, "it is important that Yemen not reach a state of instability. We need your support." Townsend replied, "you do not even have to think about it. Of course we support Yemen."

10.(S) Saleh asserted that neighboring Arab countries were intent on destabilizing his country by supporting the southern "secessionist" movement, "not because they have anything against Yemen, but because we are following the United States' democracy model, and they do not want a democracy in the region." He specifically referred to Crown Prince Sultan of Saudi Arabia, but inculpated other Gulf countries as well. According to Saleh, Gulf Islamic organizations are funding the opposition in the South and supporting secessionist movement leaders living in Oman, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. He said some of those regional Islamic organizations had links to the radical factions within the Islamist opposition party Islah - calling them "jihadists, salafis, and al-Qaeda." (Note: Islah is the largest opposition party in Yemen and is largely recognized as moderate. It includes radical factions that are considered to be a minority. End Note)

USG Support: CT, Cash Courier Law and Joint Operations

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11.(C) Townsend asked about the progress of Yemen's draft counterterrorism (CT) law. Saleh answered, "it has come a long way, but we have not yet fully achieved our goals." Townsend offered USG technical assistance in drafting the law and training for its implementation, which Saleh casually accepted. (Note: The Minister of Legal Affairs recently rejected an offer for the same assistance (ref D). The lack of an effective CT law sometimes leaves the ROYG without a legal basis to hold terrorists. Post views passage of a comprehensive CT Law as a significant step in strengthening counterterrorism bilateral relations. End Note)

12.(C) Townsend recommended a cash courier law to strengthen Yemen's efforts at combating terrorism and proposed USG assistance with the drafting of this law as well, which Saleh also nonchalantly accepted. (Comment: Saleh's informal manner makes it unclear how resolute he was in accepting, yet it is certain that he did not reject the offers made by Townsend and generally agreed to her proposals. End Comment)

13.(S) Townsend said USG agencies want to work with the ROYG on counterterrorism outside, not just inside, Yemen. Saleh agreed. He noted that Usama bin Laden's personal bodyguards are all Yemeni, alluding to the need for USG-ROYG cooperation in the tribal areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Saleh added that "violence by governments is not always the answer," and asked for greater USG assistance in development. (Note: Yemen is a beneficiary of significant non-CT aid through the Middle East Partnership Initiative, the US Department of Agriculture Food for Progress Program and, as of November 1, returns to the Millennium Challenge Cooperation's Threshold Country Program. End Note)

Iran, Iran, Iran

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14.(S) Throughout the meeting, Saleh repeatedly asked about

Iran and the USG's position vis-a-vis the country. Townsend replied that if Iran does not get serious, the USG will be forced to return to the United Nations to request more sanctions.

15.(S) Saleh warned Townsend about Qatar's relationship with Iran, cautioning that although the two countries are allies, Iran could turn on Qatar at any time. Townsend agreed, saying she had relayed the same message to Qatar, and asked Saleh if he had spoken to the Qatari Emir about this matter. Saleh responded, "of course." He also asked Townsend to deliver a verbatim message to President Bush about Iran: "you must discipline and tame a child when he is young."

16.(S) On Iraq, Saleh asked Townsend to tell President Bush that, "Maliki represents Iran in Iraq, he is worse than Ahmedinejad." He repeatedly referred to Maliki as a "dog," although the embarrassed interpreter substituted the word "he."

Foreign Fighters to Iraq

17.(S) Townsend expressed USG concern over young Yemeni men going to fight in Iraq and asked Saleh to do more to tackle the problem. Saleh replied that it is an extremely difficult task, as Yemeni men do not travel directly to Iraq. They first travel to Cairo, Damascus, or Riyadh, making it practically impossible to track who is traveling to Baghdad. Townsend suggested publicly announcing airport interrogations of young men suspected of going to Iraq. She noted that the fear of getting caught itself might stem the flow of foreign fighters. Saleh agreed and said the ROYG will try to do more. (Note: Yemeni security services currently try to scrutinize young male Yemeni travelers, particularly those traveling to Damascus, as a means to identify foreign fighters, and sometimes deny them travel. End Note)

Letters Exchanged

18.(C) Townsend delivered a letter from President Bush to President Saleh. The letter was read by both Saleh and Foreign Minister al-Qirbi. Saleh responded to it by

emphasizing Yemen's willingness to "cooperate with everything that is included in President Bush's letter." With this, he insisted the United States continue to support Yemen, both financially and politically, and "stand in the way of those against us." Saleh presented Townsend with a letter for President Bush and a report on Yemen's efforts to combat terrorism.

Comment

19.(S) Overall, this meeting was more constructive than some observers would have expected. Given Saleh's colorful character and knack for theatrics, the inclusion of a weapons trafficker during his lunch with Townsend was not a complete surprise. Saleh's action was seen by some as a veiled threat to Mana'a, but was clearly also a message to the USG that in his country he will do as he pleases. Like other leaders in the region, Saleh is loathe to be perceived as subservient to US or Western interests. His use of the dual threats of terrorism and instability when referring to internal conflict is also not new. Saleh consistently uses this tactic when attempting to garner USG support. Saleh's allowing USG interrogation of al-Badawi is positive. The fact that Saleh released this convicted terrorist, despite USG objections, however, is cause for concern. Saleh's acceptance of Townsend's proposal of assistance in drafting the CT and cash courier law and his commitment to joint action to combat terrorism outside Yemen are welcome developments, as is his willingness to cooperate to stem the flow of Yemeni fighters to Iraq, even if his acceptance of these ideas is nonchalant. Post will continue to work with the ROYG to ensure these commitments are not forgotten.

20.(U) Minimize considered for Baghdad.
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